

Chelsea School  
Executive Summary 2007

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## **Forward**

Hello, my name is Tony Messina. I am the Head of School at Chelsea School, which serves students with learning disabilities and is located just over the Washington, DC border in Silver Spring, Maryland. We are a school filled with big dreams and big hearts. For the children and the families we serve, our school is a beacon of hope.

If you were to ask me what the profile of a learning-disabled student looks like, I could show you pictures of Albert Einstein, John F. Kennedy, or even my own son. If you asked me what they all had in common, I would tell you about the many language-based challenges facing individuals who learn differently and about the courage, hope, and determination that such people needed to succeed. At Chelsea School, our halls echo with the voices of such individuals.

The motto of Chelsea School, posted in every classroom, is a belief in Chelsea P.R.I.D.E. -- Personal Respect and Individual Dedication to Excellence is the standard to which we hold every student who walks through our doors. When a student arrives at Chelsea School he/she is given a rare and unique chance; a chance for a wonderful life. The opportunity for these very deserving young people can continue through the assistance and shared resources of individuals such as you. We are embarking on an ambitious capital fund-raising campaign and I am reaching across the table and asking for your financial support.

The following document will tell you who we are, who we serve, and how we serve them. It will also describe the critical path that we need to take to guarantee the expansion and fulfillment of our vision. Join us in this initiative and be a part of our bold new future.

Thank you,

Anthony R. Messina Jr.  
Head of School

## **Mission:**

To prepare students with language based learning disabilities for higher education by providing a world-class school which embeds literacy remediation and technology into all aspects of the curriculum.

## **Vision:**

- Every teacher is a teacher of reading and writing
- High academic standards supported through authentic exhibitions of learning
- An academic advisor for every student, who also serves as the students advocate and case manager
- Instructional, assistive, and collaborative technology converging as a singular learning tool embedded throughout the school culture
- A devotion to strengthening the psychosocial and emotional health of every student
- Senior year internship which is part of a senior portfolio
- All parents are true partners in their children's education and their voices are part of our collective conversation
- All staff development anchored in empirical evidence and consistent with best practices and educational research for students with language-based learning disabilities
- Development of the Learning and Technology Institute at Chelsea School which will focus on staff-development, outreach education, research and product development

## Who We Are

Chelsea School was established in 1976 by Betty Nehemias and Eleanor Worthy, two parents of children with dyslexia from Washington, DC. With only six students in a church basement, Chelsea School was established with a philosophy predicated on serving children with learning disabilities for whom the public schools had failed to provide an appropriate and meaningful education. From the very beginning, the focus was on providing a skill-based curriculum to students organized in small homogenous groups based on reading level. The teaching methods that were established were individualized and multi-sensory and included intensive reading intervention based on the most current research and findings. As the school's reputation grew in the 70's and 80's, families throughout the Washington, DC area began to look to Chelsea School to help their children who were struggling with learning disabilities.

The year 1989 was a watershed for Chelsea School. In that year, the school made a major evolutionary shift in its focus by admitting publicly-funded students from Washington, DC, Virginia, and Maryland. Chelsea School had always been dedicated to those students who were not adequately served; however, now admission to the program could be extended to students who would not have had the economic means otherwise. This came about through a change in federal legislation. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1979 (IDEA) was enacted to ensure equal access to public education by all students, irrespective of disability. As many school districts were unable to meet the needs of students with specific learning disabilities, they turned to private schools like Chelsea School to provide access to the curriculum through disability-specific individualized methods. This legislation opened the doors of Chelsea School to many children. It ensured that students from various economic and social backgrounds would be afforded access to a superior education regardless of economic means.

The benefits to the school, students, and community since 1989 have been profound. Chelsea School's program model of educating children with learning disabilities was expanded to include children who would not have had the economic means to attend a school that met their individual needs and learning differences. Chelsea School has continued this vision to this day. Currently, over 95% of our students are funded by their public school jurisdictions.<sup>1</sup>

The Chelsea School commitment to providing a superior education to children with learning disabilities continues today. Our world-class staff of educators is working on the cutting edge of special education research and methodology. The commitment to small classes, individualized multi-sensory instruction, explicit direction and assessment, and intensive reading intervention based on current research is as strong as it was 30 years ago. The Literacy Department has pioneered and created a reading program anchored on four principles— Profile, Plan, Process, and Product<sup>2</sup>. This plan is designed to meet the individual needs of all our students and begins on their first day of enrollment.

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<sup>1</sup> Current, May, 2007

<sup>2</sup> For a complete description, see Appendix, page 19.

The goal of our program model is to take every child beyond functional literacy, and into a world where literacy is used to enhance one's own life and the lives of others.

In addition to its profound impact upon a student's academic life, Chelsea School focuses on the individual's psycho-social and emotional growth. For the first time in many of our students' lives, they are free to be themselves. They no longer feel ostracized because they are in "different" classes or are pulled out of general education classes for special education services making their differences even more obvious to their peers. They are no longer teased or live in fear at having their learning differences exposed during a classroom activity. For the first time, many of our students can talk about their learning challenges and discuss how their brains work and how they learn as individuals. They find teachers and staff who embrace their learning differences and offer them the support and nurturing that they need to successful today, tomorrow and beyond.

**Who We Serve**

The following charts show the breakdown of the Chelsea School student body by ethnicity, public school jurisdiction, and gender.

Table 1: Chelsea School Student Body – Breakdown by Ethnicity

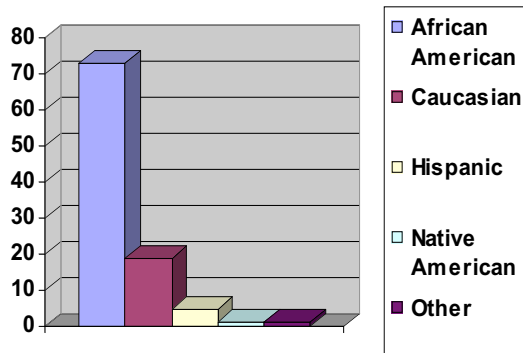


Table 2: Chelsea School Student Body – Breakdown by Public School Jurisdiction

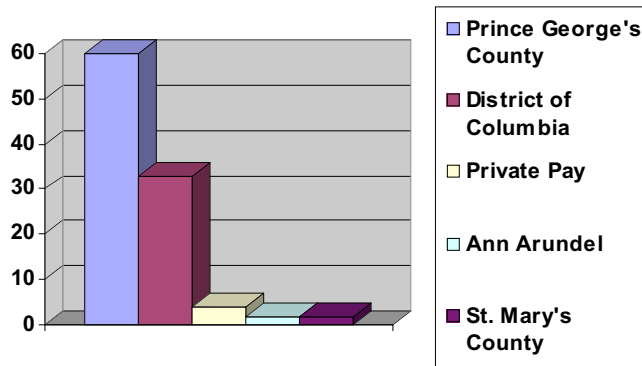
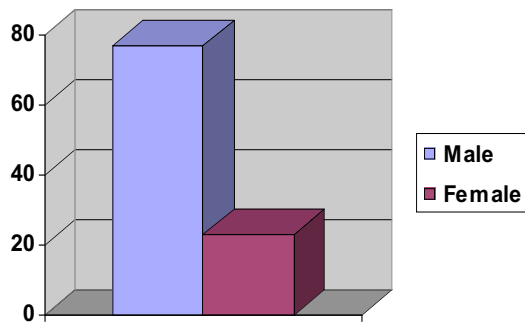


Table 3: Chelsea School Student Body – Breakdown by Gender

Table 3: Chelsea School Student



Chelsea School focuses on a student population which has been inadequately served by public education. Many of our teachers cite this under-served characteristic of our student population as the main reason why they come to work every day, the main reason why they stay long after the school day is over, and the main reason why they stay at Chelsea School. Each of our students has a compelling story to tell. There are common threads such as frustration, neglect, educational trauma, and unspeakable abuse, but there are also commonalities of hope, tenacity, and courage. The following student profiles offer three different views of the Chelsea School student and provide snapshots of our student body.

#### **Student Profile – George (Class of 2009)**

George, like many of our students, grew up in a socio-economically challenged neighborhood of Washington, DC. At the age of nine he was shot in the stomach twice by a 45-caliber handgun during random crossfire outside his home. As he was recuperating from surgery to repair a hole in his intestines, he experienced the deaths of two of his young cousins. George has struggled with the effects of this trauma ever since.

George came to the Chelsea School in the summer of his seventh grade year. Held back several times in public schools, he had grown used to being the oldest kid in his class. Despite his mother's request for an evaluation in kindergarten, George repeated second and third grades and struggled through elementary school without achieving the basic reading skills of a first-grader. Unable to articulate his frustration, George would come to the verge of tears trying to understand why he couldn't read. Intellectually, George was at an appropriate level for his grade; he simply couldn't read.

Since coming to the Chelsea School, George has accumulated the skills necessary for functional literacy. George has shown strong affinities in the areas of math and science and has developed interests in architecture, engineering, and law.

An example of a young man overcoming adversity, George is also a favorite of his teachers and a natural leader. He has a heart of gold and a genuine sense of compassion for other children. He works hard and understands the importance of the intensive literacy intervention that he receives every day. He's still not

sure what he wants to do for a career, but he often says that he wants desperately to help kids just like himself.

#### **Student Profile - Jackie (Class of 2007)**

Next year if you gaze up at the rafters in our gymnasium, you'll see the retired jersey and number of Jackie, a 2007 graduate of the Chelsea School. Jackie has been an integral part of our basketball program ever since she came to the school as a shy 5<sup>th</sup> grader. She is now the first Chelsea School athlete to have her number retired. Her leadership and dedication to her teammates set her apart as a unique player on the court.

In the classroom, Jackie made tremendous progress while here at Chelsea School. A frequent honor roll student, she took part in Chelsea School's career pathway program in media production. She excelled in this program and took on a number of video production projects during her senior year. Jackie spearheaded several school media projects and was instrumental in producing videos that highlighted Chelsea School's unique technology programs. As a result, Jackie began to think seriously about a career in film. After being accepted to several universities, Jackie decided on Hofstra in New York, where she'll be studying film this fall. Echoing her retired jersey, one day you may gaze up and see her name in the credits of a major motion picture.

#### **Student Profile - Thomas (Class of 2013)**

Thomas joined the Chelsea School at the beginning of 6<sup>th</sup> grade. At that time, his reading skills were at a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade level. Although Thomas had specific language skills in the superior range of functioning; his reading weaknesses were negatively affecting his ability to gain information from printed material. Additionally, at Thomas's prior school, his mother noted that he was not engaging with peers, and his teachers reported frequent absences. Thomas did not like school.

Upon entering Chelsea School, Thomas was placed in small classes, given a reading tutorial and reading/study skills class in addition to his core classes, and explored the option of using various methods of assistive technology for use in classroom activities and assignments. Thomas was challenged to access and present information that reflected his high intelligence despite his learning weaknesses. He was able to do this due to the multitudes of support he was given: teacher support, scaffolded curriculum, direct daily instruction in reading and spelling, assistive technology, and peer support.

By the end of the school year, Thomas's overall reading score had improved to the 4.5 grade level, and his reading comprehension had improved six grade levels to nearly the 9<sup>th</sup> grade level! Even more remarkable was Thomas's new-found enjoyment of school. Thomas collaborated with teachers and peers to generate new after-school clubs. According to his mother's report, Thomas was more actively engaging with peers and no longer tried to avoid school.

## **How We Serve**

Chelsea School has a long-standing tradition of hiring quality educators. Many of our teachers have experienced learning disabilities first hand in the lives of their children, siblings, or friends. Our faculty is committed to providing our students with the best education available, individualized to meet the needs of each student. Every one of our teachers has a favorite memory, usually an “ah ha!” moment, when a student understood a concept or topic for the first time. Our school is full of professionals who are committed to their students, who work hard in and out of school to prepare and study new ways of teaching our rigorous content. The following profiles offer a window into our current faculty and administration.

### **Faculty Profile – Dr. James Conklin (Mathematics)**

Upon completing his Doctorate at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Jim Conklin began his professional career by teaching physics courses at the graduate and undergraduate level, and a few specialized math courses, at the University of Florida, where he also did computational research on the energy-band structure of semiconductors and its relationship to their physical and electrical properties.

Because of his interest in the use of computers for instruction and research, Dr. Conklin was eventually appointed Director of the Center for Instructional and Research Computing Activities at the University of Florida; he was responsible for developing and supporting academic computing facilities and activities throughout the UF campus. He subsequently held positions as the Director of the Computational Facility at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, the Director of the BITNET Information Center, and Acting Director of Information Technology at the Smithsonian Institution. Despite his professional responsibilities for computer and networking support, Dr. Conklin maintained his love of teaching, which he continued to do whenever he had an opportunity.

Upon leaving the Smithsonian Institution, Jim decided that it was time to return to teaching, and he was eager to try his hand at helping adolescents. He secured a position as a long-term substitute in math at Chelsea School, which he discovered seemed a perfect match for his personality and interests in helping children with learning disabilities. In the fall of 2001, Chelsea School offered him a permanent position teaching math and physics.

“I teach because I enjoy being with children,” said Jim. “I teach at Chelsea School because I find the small-group setting, with the individualized attention I am able to give to each child, very rewarding. I am thrilled each time a student who enters my class with little or no self confidence in their ability to learn mathematics or physics develops the ability to do well and even enjoy the subject. I’m thrilled when students develop a real liking for intellectual challenge, take pride in doing their

best, and consistently turn in work of which they can be proud. Those 'I can do it!' discoveries by my students are my reason for teaching, my reward for all the lessons planned, papers graded, and paperwork completed."

Jim is very interested in using computer technology to facilitate his students' learning. Last year he introduced a computer-based textbook for his Physics students to give them the benefit of its interactive examples, simulations, and oral reading of many descriptions. He has also begun to use simulations from the University of Colorado as part of his instruction in Physics. Jim is currently taking a course in using The Geometer's Sketchpad software as a learning tool to facilitate discovery in Geometry and Algebra.

#### **Faculty Profile - Melissa Wood (Literacy Coordinator)**

Melissa Wood joined the Chelsea School in January 2007 after relocating from Boston. Melissa's previous work as a reading specialist and speech-language pathologist in public school and clinical settings instilled in her a love for teaching adolescents, and in particular teaching struggling adolescent readers. "There is nothing more powerful than teaching a student who never thought he or she could read a book. The look on their faces makes every day worthwhile!" says Melissa.

Melissa has an extensive background working with children with learning disabilities. After receiving her Bachelor's Degree from Williams College and her Master's Degree from the Massachusetts General Hospital Institute of Health Professions, Melissa began work as a speech-language pathologist in the Dedham, MA elementary schools. Her passion for the integration of spoken and written language led her next to the Massachusetts General Hospital, where she became a member of their Learning Disabilities Team, and later to the Kennedy Krieger Institute. Melissa noted that her past experiences strongly shaped the manner in which she "thinks about the interplay of cognition, language, executive functions, and emotions in adolescent learning."

Through memberships in the International Dyslexia Association and the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, Melissa works hard to integrate new research and technology into her daily practice. She believes that combining research with innovation and passion is crucial when teaching adolescents.

Melissa is so happy to have found a home here at Chelsea School. "I will never forget my first week at Chelsea School when a student who I did not yet know approached me early one morning. He said, 'You teach reading. Can you help me with something?' This type of drive and dedication is representative of our students. I feel so strongly for them and it is my honor to work with them every day!"

### **Faculty Profile – Frank Mills (English)**

When Frank Mills came to the Chelsea School in 2005 he was making a radical career change. Although he had a bachelor's degree in English from Providence College, Frank had spent most of his professional time in the corporate world. After several years working in publishing and marketing he found himself in Maryland looking for his first teaching job.

"I'd be in board meetings or at conferences, and I was constantly thinking about teaching," said Frank. "I would go home at the end of the day and work on lesson plans, read education journals, and think of how I could make the jump to teaching. It was an obsession for me - I knew it was a true calling. I knew that I wanted to teach learning disabled kids because I remembered all of the struggles that my sister went through as an LD kid. I remembered her feelings of isolation and inferiority when she was pulled out of regular classes and put in resource rooms. I wanted to work in a school where I'd get a chance to help those kids."

When Frank finally got his classroom he knew that it was a perfect fit. "I knew that I'd be good at teaching the material, but I had no idea how strongly I would feel for these kids. I feel like I've become a vital part of their lives."

Frank has been working to improve as a teacher of learning disabled students. He has been creating innovative classroom exercises that combine assistive technology with intensive skill remediation. "I was amazed to see how new technologies and advances in software could directly impact my students in the classroom. In many ways it levels the playing field for them."

In only his second year as a teacher, Frank presented his paper on using assistive technology to teach advanced literature at the 2007 Maryland Branch of the International Dyslexia Association conference in Baltimore. Frank is currently enrolled in the nationally recognized Trinity (Washington) University Special Education Master's degree program.

### **Administrative Profile – Katherine Fedalen**

The nickname "Chelsea for Life" has been one of the descriptors her students have attached to Kate since joining Chelsea School 18 years ago. "I read about Chelsea School moving campuses and expanding to middle school in the local newspaper during the summer after graduating from Towson University. I applied to several public schools and was in the process of making a decision regarding where I'd start my teaching career. I was intrigued by the vision of the school and the caring, nurturing feel of the school that came through in the article by way of the Executive Director at the time, Margie Gray. I cold-called the school, interviewed in the midst of moving dust and boxes and knew I had found a special place."

Kate's professional development and experience with Chelsea School students has hard wired a deep belief that "There are all kinds of learners, which means there needs to be all kinds of teaching practices that work with the students from where they

are. Even when a student's profile is similar to another's, his or her personal experiences, family dynamics, and that which drives us all to be individuals makes each student's learning needs very individual. That is why I believe it should be a school's mission to provide a learning environment that allows for and celebrates the strengths and needs of each student. Chelsea is a school where that type of understanding and acknowledgement of each child's unique self occurs every day in every class."

Kate, Chelsea's Assistant Head of School, has presented at MANSEF's annual conference, was recognized by NAIS "Stars in Education" conference and is currently finishing her Master's of Education in Instructional Technology.

#### **Administrative Profile - Anthony R. Messina Jr.**

Tony Messina has enjoyed a rich and rewarding career as an educator. As a music teacher in the Shoreham-Wading River School District on Long Island, Tony worked under the mentorship of Dr. Dennis Litky, noted innovator in school reform and alternative education. Tony completed both graduate and post-graduate studies in School Administration and Education Technology at New York University and served as Director of Technology at the American School in London. His background in technology, teaching methodology, and cognitive and neurosciences gives him a unique perspective on learning-disabled students.

After 28 years as a public school teacher and administrator in New York, Tony bought a sailboat. It had been his dream to retire, buy a sailboat, and take it easy. Tony enjoyed a few months of agenda-free leisure. Unfortunately for Tony, he realized he couldn't relax, couldn't take it easy, and that he had work still to do. As he would say, he couldn't "get the taste of school out of his mouth."

He kept seeing the faces of all the kids that he helped over the years and realized that his work wasn't finished. He remembered the special impact that an educator can have in a person's life and he wanted back in. Before he retired he began to consult with high schools in the New York metropolitan area and had been asked to create alternative schools for kids who didn't fit the traditional high school model. While working in a school that he had created for at-risk middle school students, he realized that he had reached back to his core values. "The kids that we had then had emotional issues, but I found that when I helped them become better readers, better thinkers, and producers of knowledge, the emotional problems were dispersed and the child was able to succeed."

With a recharged sense for helping students who didn't fit the mold, Tony accepted the position of Head of School at Chelsea School in 2005. When he arrived, his first mission was to talk with students and listen to them about the challenges they faced and what he could do to improve the school. He found that the needs and core values of the school were very much in tune with his own.

"I was back at the kitchen counter with my son in the fourth grade," said Tony. "My son was classified as learning disabled in elementary school and I remembered the struggles and challenges that we faced as a family. It all came rushing back to me and it sealed the deal. I knew that Chelsea School was a place where I could make a huge impact."

## **Critical Funding Necessities**

The Capital Campaign at Chelsea School is encapsulated in four key program areas: faculty retention, commitment to technology, improved physical plant, and establishing a scholarship endowment fund. Meeting these fiscal needs will allow the fulfillment of our long-range strategic plan of providing continued commitment to academic excellence, an outreach institute for teacher training, student participation in the development of emerging technologies and career pathways in the global marketplace, as well as access to the best education for all students with language-based learning disabilities in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. The reasoning and predicted outcomes of each fiscal need are described in the following section.

### **Faculty Retention**

Chelsea School has historically recruited a superior faculty; however, to ensure the ongoing success and stability of the school, Chelsea School must commit itself financially to supporting incentive programs through continuing education and competitive quality of life/benefits packages which will entice those individuals to remain part of the school community.

Currently, Chelsea School provides up to \$4,000 of funding annually for individual staff development, totaling \$60,000 per annum. The current structure of this program does not address long-term strategic goal to have every teacher at Chelsea School earn a MS degree in Special Education and places the up-front financial burden on individual faculty members. In order to best serve the interest of staff recruitment and retention, Chelsea School must make a commitment to the full funding of a Master's Degree in Special Education while meeting the requirements of certification. Additionally, Chelsea School must remain committed to fully fund advanced post-graduate studies beyond a Master's Degree. This is essential and will provide a collegial community, legitimate academic development of new and innovative methodologies, as well as the continued growth and retention of tomorrow's experts in the field of special education and educational leadership.

Chelsea School seeks to recruit and retain the best individuals whose natural abilities will allow them to develop into educational leaders. Through the partnership with Trinity (Washington) University, Chelsea School will provide funding for a Master's Degree in Special Education. This commitment will require a contractual obligation for each faculty member to remain on staff for at least three years after receiving their Master's Degree, thereby ensuring a five year minimum commitment to Chelsea School. Further, this opportunity will be extended to individuals who have

achieved a Master's Degree in a subject area but are required to hold dual certification in special education under No Child Left Behind's highly-qualified teacher requirements. To further the goal of establishing Chelsea School as a center of collegial discourse, and a leader within the academic community, it is necessary to fully fund studies towards advanced degrees. These proposals will be addressed on an individual basis and will require a time commitment beyond completion of the program as well.

Chelsea School must bring in experts in special education and research to provide advice, consultation, and ongoing staff development training at Chelsea School. This will require significant financial commitment to retain individuals who will help design and implement new initiatives to benefit our student population.

Another area where we can promote teacher retention is in improving the quality of life of the members of a collegially-minded community. Washington, DC has the sixth highest cost of living percentage in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Median income is 59,490. The average home cost in Silver Spring, MD is \$425,100<sup>4</sup>. A long-term commitment to teaching our students should not mean putting life goals on hold. Compensation must be competitive with the public schools to retain highly trained individuals. Current starting salary for a Montgomery County Public School teacher without a Master's Degree is \$41,758, with a Master's Degree it is \$46,003<sup>5</sup>. However, salaries should not be based solely on an arbitrary step-system, but set within a merit-based plan so that those faculty members who perform the best are recognized financially for their efforts while others are encouraged by example to continue to strive for excellence.

In addition to improved levels of compensation, Chelsea School is committed to providing subsidized housing for our teachers. Ideally this housing will be located on or very near the current campus facility. By providing subsidized housing, Chelsea School not only will retain faculty for longer periods, but also establish and support an active community. This freedom from fiscal worries will result in greater commitments by teachers to extracurricular activities and extended academic support programs, as well as greater focus on developing new initiatives.

Finally, quality of life concerns about such matters as insurance, financial planning/retirement, and childcare, can often cause undue stress in employees' families. These must be addressed through a stronger commitment within our benefits packages. Childcare, in particular, may run well over \$8,000 per year for a family in the Washington, DC metro area<sup>6</sup>. Insurance premiums continue to increase, limiting the ability of small non-profit facilities to provide robust benefit packages. It is therefore Chelsea School's goal to allocate significant funding towards robust employee benefit packages. These measures will enhance Chelsea School's ability to retain faculty members for significant portions of their career. This commitment to staff is actually a commitment to the students. The students benefit from consistent instruction in tested methodologies by a trained community of faculty members.

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<sup>3</sup> Source: ACCRA Cost of Living Index, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Source: Estimated House-Condo Value 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Source: Montgomery County Public Schools Salary Schedule, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Source: National Association of Child Care Resources and Referral Agencies, 2007 Report on Child Care in the District of Columbia

## Technology

At Chelsea School we believe that along with embedded literacy skills throughout the curriculum, specialized and advanced technological literacy must be fostered in our students. There are currently three areas of critical need in technology at the Chelsea School: assistive technology, computer hardware and software, and career pathways in advanced technology.

A critical component in the success of Chelsea School is assistive technology. Assistive technology is equipment that enhances one's ability to be more efficient or successful, such as the hand-held device that you use to store data and schedule your time. For children who struggle with reading but whose intellect calls for a rigorous college-preparatory curriculum, assistive technology bridges the gap between success and failure. Technological tools such as Kurzweil™, Word-Q™/ Speak-Q, Inspiration, and others allow students to access complex academic content.

### **Technology at a glance: Tim (Class of 2009)**

Tim, who reads at a fourth grade level, has been assigned to read a chapter in the novel *Animal Farm*. He has to read the chapter and answer a critical thinking question by writing a paragraph. To accomplish this, he will be using two embedded software systems: Kurzweil™ and Inspiration™. Kurzweil™ reads text that has been scanned into a computer and then allows the student to manipulate that text, with full audio playback, and compose text with the same audio capabilities. Inspiration™ is software that creates visual organizers.

Tim uses some time in advisory that day to scan the chapter into the computer. He can now read along with the chapter while listening to it or he can create an mp3 audio file of the chapter to take home. Tim reads the chapter in Kurzweil™ by adjusting the reading rate and the tracking bar that keeps his place on the line. He can look up new words using the audio dictionary or break words down into color-coded syllables right on screen. Once Tim has read through the chapter he takes a look at the critical thinking question. He types the question into a new word-processing file in Kurzweil™ so that he's sure he understands what it's asking. He knows that before he begins this paragraph, he'd better get organized. He opens Inspiration™ and chooses a web as his graphic organizer template which he uses to fill in his main idea and details. He then prints out a copy of this full-color visual model to use as a reference.

Finally, Tim is ready to type up his paragraph. He goes back to Kurzweil™ to use the word-processing features so he can listen to what he types. With his graphic organizer in hand, he types and listens to his paragraph. He can hear immediately when something doesn't sound right, be it an error in grammar or spelling. He uses the spelling and dictionary tools, as well as a word prediction feature to help him get his thoughts on paper. When he's satisfied with the edited final result, Tim prints out a copy of his paragraph to hand in to his teacher.

Without assistive technology, Tim would be struggling with the assignment described above. With assistive technology, Tim was able to read, synthesize, and compose on a level appropriate to his cognitive abilities. When assistive technology is embedded in the curriculum and is tied to skill sets, students become adept at using and adapting software and systems to their individual learning styles. This is an area of critical importance for students with learning disabilities and an area where Chelsea School must continue to devote funds to research, development, acquisition, and implementation. The goal of Chelsea School is to become an incubator and research center for developing assistive technologies in the field of learning disabilities. The next generation of software systems, such as Kurzweil™ and Inspiration™, will be developed and improved using Chelsea School students and faculty. By developing these technological tools, we hope to help learning disabled students everywhere benefit from the best and newest achievements in assistive technology.

The face of the modern classroom has changed significantly from the blackboards of 30 years ago. Access to laptops, Smart-boards™, digital tablets, computers, and state-of-the-art software platforms is essential to student success in school and beyond. In the classroom, students must become adept at using these tools and applying them to new challenges. Besides the tools themselves, faculty and students must be given extensive training in using and adapting these materials to curriculum and learning disabled pedagogy. It is the Chelsea School's goal to provide the most current and essential equipment so that every classroom is truly a cutting edge laboratory for learning. The training, implementation, and adaptation of these technological assets will be conducted in conjunction with our partners at research universities and technology firms.

The final critical component to student success through technology funding is through the development of career pathways in emerging fields of study. Currently, Chelsea School offers advanced technical programs in television and media production, music production, digital programming, digital graphic design, and computer information systems. We would like to extend these program offerings to include computer programming, software design, biotechnical studies, and forensics. To accomplish this goal, Chelsea School must secure significant funding to support the facilities, training, and materials that are required. Cutting edge laboratories, designed specifically for instruction in emerging technologies will give our students a competitive advantage over their contemporaries in both public and private education. A student whose technological fluency is grounded in rigorous study and a specialized career-focused skill-set is a student well-served by their education.

### Physical Plant

One of the biggest challenges to Chelsea School is maintaining a 60-year old building that was not designed to house a 21<sup>st</sup> century education facility. Money initially allocated for capital improvements must be redirected if and when basic operational systems in the physical plant fail. The current facility at Chelsea School is inadequately equipped to meet the expansion and technological development goals that are critical to the growth and development of our school. Chelsea School's goal is to provide its students with a state-of-the-art high-tech educational facility, a facility that will allow us to implement our technology and curriculum upgrades with an eye on career pathway

programs. We would like to provide state-of-the-art classrooms and laboratories as well as a cafeteria where our students could receive the nutritious meals they often lack. We are also seeking funding for a multi-use auditorium that could be used for lectures, seminars, and school events. A new library media center, math and science laboratories, assistive technology centers, and an arts and music center are all lacking in our present building. Improved facilities would lead to greater faculty retention, improved access to technology for students, and an opportunity to expand Chelsea School's outreach endeavors. Chelsea School needs a new school, which will position our students for the global technological market place today, tomorrow and beyond.

### Scholarship and Endowment Fund

When Chelsea School opened its doors to publicly-funded students in 1989, the program model of the school was shifted to focus on a neglected and under-served student population. When financial obstacles are eliminated, a superior education becomes available to students who risk falling through the cracks of the education system. These obstacles, however, can be extremely difficult for families to overcome, especially families with limited economic resources.

Current research shows that the key to academic success for students with learning disabilities is early intervention. Within the current climate of recent legislative decisions, access to the best education for middle and lower income students with learning disabilities is becoming increasingly difficult. Parents of economically disadvantaged students often lack the financial wherewithal to pay complete tuition or to hire educational advocates to help them navigate the public school realm to get funding for Chelsea School. Additionally, parents from limited economic backgrounds have no means by which to access the best program for their child's future success. Current legislation under the IDEA states that all students are entitled to a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. A quality, individualized education for students with learning disabilities is no longer limited to the children of wealth and privilege.

In the Washington, DC metro area, where the government has deemed most schools to be failing to meet annual yearly progress, few students have the support within the public school system to be successful. As shown in our student profiles, students with learning disabilities are even less likely to succeed outside an environment like Chelsea School. Partial, if not full scholarships for as many students as possible are imperative.

As shown in research, small group instruction and specific methodologies which are used at Chelsea School, have tremendous impact on the success of students; however, public schools rarely achieve that success, measured by drop-out statistics and graduation rates. Our commitment to a college preparatory program with career pathways and career goal outcomes, we believe, will produce results that will have social and economic impact not only on the lives of our individual students, but on the communities from which they come. This goal can be achieved only with a defined plan to provide partial or full funding as early as possible to all deserving students.

## Conclusion

The story of Chelsea School is the story of an institution that changed and adapted over the years to help the children who needed it most. When the doors of Chelsea School opened in 1989 to publicly-funded students, the program model of the school was adapted and enlarged. This shift was more than just a change in policy; it was an unprecedented opportunity for previously underserved children. It was a chance to build a powerful future.

The critical path that we must follow is to expand the school's vision in the areas of staff retention, technology, facilities, scholarships, and the development of the Learning and Technology Institute at Chelsea School. To achieve this, we need the support of individuals, corporations, foundations, and universities to provide the necessary funding and resources. We are in the business of saving lives and we need your help. For every child we save, we help save a neighborhood. For every family that we reach out to, we build a stronger community. When we send children to college we send out the future teachers, lawyers, advocates, and doctors who will one day serve children just like themselves. The work that we do in this small school is much bigger than the walls which contain it; it is exponentially bigger, and it is work that must continue to be expanded to help improve the lives of children with learning disabilities today, tomorrow, and beyond.

## **Appendix A**

### **The Four Principles of the Chelsea School Reading Program**

**Profile**

**Plan**

**Program**

**Performance**

Tony Messina, MA, Advanced Certificate in Education Technology, Head of School

James Cowan, MS, Ed, Director of Curriculum & Instruction

Melissa Wood, MS, CCC-SLP, Literacy Coordinator

The Chelsea School Reading Program is built around the key characteristics of an effective school-wide adolescent literacy program: literacy is a top priority; we have high expectations and strong academic emphasis within our program; our leadership team strongly believes in, and takes part in, this literacy program; we engage in data-driven instruction, embed professional development into all arenas of instruction, reach out to our parents to involve them fully in their children's education, and sincerely take ownership and responsibility for our students' learning because we are committed to making a difference in their lives<sup>7</sup>. We are constantly striving to better ourselves as an institution with the vision of taking every child beyond functional literacy, and into a world where literacy is used to enhance one's own life and the lives of others.

Through the four principles of our reading program -- Profile, Plan, Program, Performance -- Chelsea School ensures that each student receives the individualized instruction necessary to ensure success. Reading and writing instruction is guided by multi-sensory, structured-language (MSL) reading approaches. Instruction is direct and explicit, and consistently guided by assessment. Additionally, the four principles ensure that each Chelsea School teacher enhances his or her understanding of literacy research, methodology and application through instructional leadership teams, mentorship, and professional development.

Chelsea School's four principles of reading instruction are highlighted below.

1. **Profile** each student

- Review of prior testing (e.g., neuropsychological, psychological, educational, speech-language, etc.)
- Supplementary testing completed, if needed
- Review of prior instructional programs and methods to determine past performance and use as a guide for planning
- Review teacher reports

2. **Plan** for each student

Based on each individual student's profile:

- Placement in one level of the 3-tiered reading tutorial system
- Suggestions on MSL reading instruction programs (e.g., Orton-Gillingham, Wilson, Lindamood-Bell, Reading by the Rules) based on cognitive profile

3. **Program** for literacy instruction

- Tutorials
  - 3-5 days/week; designated class within schedule (not a pull out model)
  - MSL reading approach
  - Level 1 classes taught by licensed reading specialists

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<sup>7</sup> Jones, S.D. (2005). "A school-wide model for literacy change." *Perspectives, Fall 2005, The International Dyslexia Association*, 8-11

- Levels 2 & 3 classes taught by English Language Arts teachers or Speech-Language Pathologists with weekly supervision and training from literacy coordinator
- Technology instruction and application: Kurzweil™, WordQ/SpeakQ™, Soliloquy Reading Assistant™

**Program** for embedding literacy instruction throughout the curriculum

- Teacher Training
  - Continuing education through Trinity (Washington) University's Master of Education department via workshops & classes
  - Summer Institute classes to instruct and reinforce skill sets
- Technology Training & Utilization
  - Instruction on use and application to classroom projects, presentations, etc. during staff development workshops
  - Utilization of graphic tablets and other novel technology initiatives
- Mentor Process
  - Administrative team members mentor staff to facilitate development

#### 4. **Performance** evaluation

Each student's progress is measured via:

- Formal assessments (e.g., WJ-III, QRI, GORT-4, etc.)
- Informal assessments (e.g., developmental spelling inventory, rubrics)
- Technology measurements (e.g., Soliloquy Reading Assistant™ rate & accuracy measurements)
- Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals and objectives progression
- Teacher report on generalization of objectives

## Appendix B

### **Chelsea School Reading Tutorials**

#### **Level 1: Reading Skills**

The Reading Skills tutorial is a small group daily tutorial (1-3 students) designed for students who struggle with the process of decoding and encoding (i.e., reading and spelling). These students are within Stages 1 and 2 of Jean Chall's Stages of Reading Development (Stage 1: Initial Reading or Decoding, Stage 2: Confirmation, Fluency, Ungluing from Print). Students receive intensive instruction in the areas of phonological awareness, decoding, and encoding. The curriculum incorporates elements from multi-sensory, systematic, structured reading programs such as *Orton-Gillingham*, *Wilson*, *Lindamood-Bell*, and *Reading by the Rules (WKRP)*, dependent on each student's cognitive profile. Additionally, students are introduced to assistive technology devices such as *Kurzweil 3000* and *WordQ/SpeakQ*. The goal of this tutorial is to bridge students into Stage 3: Reading to Learn. Additionally, instruction in vocabulary, reading comprehension, and written expression is incorporated into lessons in order to address global written language (i.e., reading and writing) development.

#### **Level 2: Reading Fluency**

The Reading Fluency tutorial is a small group daily tutorial (3-5 students) designed for students who have solid decoding abilities, but do not yet read fluidly or with proper expression and phrasing. Due to reduced fluency, students are not yet able to fully dedicate their attention to the meaning of the text. Classes include targeted work on reading rate, accuracy, expression and phrasing. Additionally, each student works with the *Soliloquy Reading Assistant*, a computer program that allows students to practice independent repeated oral reading using speech recognition and verification technology. Reinforcement of decoding and encoding principles and instruction in vocabulary, reading comprehension, and written expression is incorporated into lessons in order to address global written language (i.e., reading and writing) development.

#### **Level 3: Reading Comprehension**

The Reading Comprehension tutorial is a small group daily tutorial (4-6 students) designed for students who need more focused work on comprehension strategies. Students will be exposed to literature from a variety of genres and will work on strengthening their understanding of organizational patterns of expression (i.e., narrative, purpose, compare/contrast, opinion, enumerative, descriptive, and cause-effect), vocabulary, figurative language, and literary devices (e.g., irony, tone, etc.). Through structured lessons, students will receive reinforcement in decoding and encoding principles, oral reading fluency, and written expression.